

VZCZCXRO7632
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0001/01 0030657
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 030657Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7018
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0690

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000001

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/03/2027

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI AMBASSADOR ON HIZBALLAH VISIT, BERRI
INITIATIVE

REF: A. BEIRUT 3908

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 3913

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (S) Saudi Ambassador Abdulaziz Khoja, meeting with Ambassador Feltman on 12/30, said that Hizballah members Na'im Qassim and Mohammed Fneish would not have been reassured by their 12/27 audience with King Abdullah. Abdullah rebuffed their attempts to encourage a Saudi-Syrian dialogue, insisting that Hizballah work with the other Lebanese to find solutions to Lebanon's problems. Critical of the ongoing street protests in Beirut, Abdullah also strongly defended PM Siniora and Saad Hariri against Qassim's attacks and underscored Saudi Arabia's commitment to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Khoja claimed not to be familiar with specific threat information the Hizballah visitors shared later with intelligence chief Prince Muqrin regarding the Hajj. Khoja and the Ambassador agreed that Speaker Berri's initiative (ref a) was a non-starter (and, indeed, later that day Berri informed both that he was dropping his idea). Khoja said that, while Saudi Arabia remained open to the idea of hosting Lebanon's political leaders, he did not see much promise of success for the moment. End summary.

QASSIM, FNEISH CALL
ON SAUDI KING ABDULLAH

[1](#)2. (S) Receiving the Ambassador at his apartment on the first day of 'Eid al-Adha, Khoja confirmed the account (ref b) by Minister of Information Ghazi Aridi that Hizballah second-in-command Qassim and (resigned) Minister of Energy and Water Fneish had met with King Abdullah the previous Wednesday (12/27). When Hizballah had requested the meeting through intermediaries in Riyadh, Abdullah insisted that Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah issue a communique first -- which Nasrallah did -- calling on Hajj pilgrims to be peaceful. Without going into detail, Khoja said that Saudi Arabia had information suggesting that Iran hoped to use Hizballah pilgrims to disrupt the Hajj.

[1](#)3. (S) On the Saudi side, Abdullah included Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, intelligence chief Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, and Khoja. The Hizballah visitors, Khoja claimed, were unhappy at Khoja's presence, having been annoyed at the Saudi envoy ever since his forceful intervention to stop a

potential December 1 Hizballah-Aoun attack on the Grand Serail government compound. While being customarily polite, Abdullah made it clear that Khoja enjoys the king's confidence. Qassim, while responding with predictable flowery praise for Khoja, hinted that Khoja should maintain a more neutral posture. Abdullah responded that others in Lebanon complained that Khoja had been too sympathetic to Hizballah, suggesting to the king that Khoja was behaving appropriately.

HIZBALLAH URGES SAUDI-SYRIAN
RAPPROCHEMENT TO SOLVE LEBANON'S ILLS

¶4. (S) According to Khoja, encouraging a Saudi-Syrian rapprochement seemed to be the primary Hizballah message. Qassim, who did most of the talking, told Abdullah that Saudi Arabia and Syria, working together, could easily solve Lebanon's problems. Abdullah could not resist making a "little joke," Khoja said; maybe, the king said, he could talk to Syrian President Bashar al-Asad once the king again became a "full man" (a reference to Asad's notorious August speech referring to the "half-men" of the Arab world). But for the most part, Abdullah did not address the question of Syria directly, even though Qassim kept trying it from different angles. Instead, he responded by telling Qassim and Fneish that the Lebanese had to work out their problems on their own. Rather than talk to him, the Lebanese should be talking to each other. Specifically, Hizballah needed to sit down with Siniora, Hariri, and Walid Jumblatt.

DISAGREEING OVER SINIORA, HARIRI

¶5. (S) Emphasizing that everything was cloaked in

BEIRUT 00000001 002 OF 003

diplomatic language that failed to mask a frank exchange, Khoja reported that Qassim and Fneish accused Siniora, Hariri, and Jumblatt of perfidy. While Jumblatt was beyond hope of redemption, their experience in dealing with Siniora and Hariri in particular was not good. Something is agreed upon, and then they receive orders from their U.S. masters to break the deal. Siniora receives instructions directly from the U.S. Ambassador and cannot be trusted. Abdullah "shut them up," Khoja said, by praising effusively Siniora as a Lebanese patriot and Saad Hariri "as a brother and son of Saudi Arabia." Saudi Arabia fully supports both. The king again argued that the Lebanese have to learn to deal with each other and not rely on foreigners to solve their problems. The king expressed confidence that Siniora and Hariri would always work for Lebanon's best interests.

. . . AND OVER THE TRIBUNAL

¶6. (S) Abdullah asked his Hizballah visitors pointedly why they were blocking the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which he described as a high priority for the kingdom. Qassim claimed that Hizballah, per the decision of the March 2 session of the National Dialogue, fully supported the principle of the tribunal. But there were some constitutional and legal concerns with the current draft he claimed. Abdullah again urged Hizballah to sit down with others to make the concerns clear. If the concerns were minor, then surely the Lebanese could collectively agree to address them. But Saudi Arabia did not want the tribunal to be stripped of effective authority. The king also told his visitors that one of the reasons they face difficulties with Saad Hariri is the tribunal, since Hizballah is perceived as trying to derail something that is a top priority for Hariri and the Sunnis.

SIT DOWN TOGETHER, RATHER
THAN CONTINUE SIT-INS

¶7. (S) According to Khoja, Abdullah also asked Hizballah, in reference to the ongoing sit-in demonstrations, "why do you want to destroy your country?" Told by Qassim that Hizballah is merely trying to exercise freedom of expression and assembly in order to have a more effective voice within the GOL, Abdullah repeated his earlier counsel: Hizballah should sit down and talk directly with the others. Abdullah made it clear that he did not support using the street to change the government. When Qassim tried to raise concerns about Sunni-Shia tensions, Abdullah responded that Lebanon also had Druse, Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and others. Don't talk of Sunni-Shia tensions; you are all Lebanese and should work together for solutions, the King urged.

¶8. (S) As for the security information they carried, Qassim and Fneish, immediately after their meeting with Abdullah, met privately with intelligence chief Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz. Khoja claimed that he had not yet received a read-out of that meeting and thus did not know what specific security information the Hizballah delegation shared.

BERRI INITIATIVE: DOA

¶9. (S) The Ambassador and Khoja then compared notes on the "National Salvation Government" initiative proposed by Parliament Speaker Berri (ref a). Both agreed that the proposed cabinet formation would be unacceptable to the March 14 forces, who would be reduced to having only three out of ten ministers. (Later that day, during an 'Eid call with the Ambassador, Berri said that he was dropping his proposal, a message he also passed to Khoja. "It seems no one likes my idea," Berri said.)

SAUDI DIPLOMACY

¶10. (S) The Ambassador asked Khoja whether Saudi Arabia was still interested in hosting Lebanon's political leaders in a dialogue session. Making some veiled criticism of Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa's initiative, Khoja said that, indeed, Saudi Arabia would welcome playing a constructive role, as long as the Lebanese were making the actual decisions among themselves. But, he said, the enthusiasm for some kind of Saudi-hosted meeting is waning

BEIRUT 00000001 003 OF 003

slightly compared to ten days ago, for there does not seem to be much chance of success at the moment. Having a Saudi-sponsored meeting now would probably raise expectations that could not be fulfilled, Khoja said, making things worse, not better. Questioned explicitly by the Ambassador, Khoja said that there is no Saudi initiative currently on the table.
FELTMAN